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SUBJECT: ARROYO OPPOSITION FAILS TO PRODUCE MASSIVE
DEMONSTRATION

REF: A. MANILA 3187

[1](#)B. MANILA 3167

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: A July 13 opposition rally in Manila's central business district produced only an estimated 15-20,000 demonstrators as of 1600 hrs local, although numbers may grow somewhat with speakers like FPJ widow Susan Roces later on. Police appear to have blocked busloads of would-be protesters, some of them possibly "rent-a-crowds." There were no reports of violence. The opposition plans additional rallies to highlight its call for President Arroyo to resign, but the momentum for protest appears for now to have sizzled -- barring new scandals that might affect the President's credibility. Pro-GMA forces also plan a large public demonstration on July 16. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) A July 13 opposition rally as of 1600 hours local in the central business district of Makati in Metro Manila had produced a mostly lackluster crowd that emboffs and others estimated at no more than 15-20,000 people, despite claims from organizers of up to 100,000 demonstrators already. The rally is scheduled to last until 8 p.m., but many predict it will continue longer. Although the crowd was the probably the largest yet this summer, it was significantly smaller than the 50,000 to one million crowd that some opposition leaders had anticipated. Traffic was interrupted in Makati, but not on the near-by EDSA ring road (where 1986 and 2001 "people protests" took place) or other major arteries. According to media reports, Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, an opposition leader, closed Makati City Hall at midday on July 13 and instructed all employees to attend the rally. There are also numerous reports of "rent-a-crowd" protesters, and of Philippine National Police restrictions on busloads of protesters traveling on EDSA to get to the rally. There were no reports of violence.

[1](#)3. (U) Various speakers at the rally have already called on President Arroyo to resign. Susan Roces, widow of the late 2004 presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr., was scheduled to speak at 6 p.m. and also to call for Arroyo to step down. Other participants in the protests included Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson and Renato De Villa, leader of the Reporma political party and a former Secretary of Defense under then-president Fidel Ramos. Significant numbers of protesters appeared to come from supporters of former president Joseph Estrada as well as from "legal left" political parties including Bayan Muna, Anak Pawis, San Lakas, Gabriela, and Bayan as well as from the militant labor union Kilosang Mayo Uno (KMU). Anti-Arroyo college students were also present. Evangelical Christian supporters of Brother Eddie Villanueva participated in the rally, following their smaller July 12 anti-Arroyo "nighttime vigil" in the same Makati venue.

[1](#)4. (U) Supporters of President Arroyo separately plan a July 16 "Gathering for Peace and Unity for the Rule of Law" in downtown Manila closer to Malacanang Palace (and the Embassy), and are hoping for a turnout of between 100,000 and 200,000.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Comment: Despite opposition plans for additional rallies, the anti-GMA momentum seems to have fizzled following the decision of Catholic Bishops not to support a call for Arroyo's resignation. In the absence of a new scandal that might further affect Arroyo's credibility and leadership, opposition efforts to galvanize much of a popular turnout are unlikely to be any more successful than today. Rainy weather at this time